

The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief  
The Lower Caverns

By Joseph Bloch

**Background:** When originally published, *The Steading of the Hill Giant Chief* made several references to a series of caverns and other features below the southern and western portion of the Dungeon Level that was published in the adventure. Those caverns and dungeons were never detailed, and the only clues to their nature were in the descriptions for some of the encounter areas (18, 19, 21, and 23, in the original module).

When the module was re-released as part of the compilation *Queen of the Spiders* in 1986, the descriptions were left unchanged. In 1999, it was once again re-released as part of a compilation, *Against the Giants, The Liberation of Geoff*. For that volume, Sean K. Reynolds added new material, including the following line in the description of area 21: "Those unmapped lower levels wander off into darkness, being barren of treasure or anything of interest aside from many, many different types of fungus."

However, in the Gygaxian spirit of putting some of the most interesting discoveries in the most unlikely of places, the following addendum is offered for the Dungeon Master who would like to spice up those lower caverns beyond nothing more than fungus, carrion crawlers, and lizards. It will also add the possibility of finding new information that will assist the party as they go on to face the frost and fire giants, and their puppet-masters the drow of house Eilservs.

## The Drow, the Hill Giants, and the Elder Elemental God

While little history was given in the original module, the Dungeon Master should keep in mind that the entire dungeon level was originally much more extensive than shown on the Dungeon Level Map. It was built by followers of the Elder Elemental God in the distant past. That the Hill Giants situated their fortress on the same site was either an act of great coincidence or the result of some subtle unconscious guidance. Whatever the reason, when House Eilservs turned from the worship of Lolth to that of the Elder Elemental God, and they sought allies and operatives in the lands above, they took this fact as a sign, and enlisted Nosnra and his hill giants as followers.

At the time, large sections of the dungeon level were almost entirely collapsed, choked with debris from centuries of disuse and the occasional earthquake. The drow emissaries convinced the giants to use orc slaves to begin clearing out the dungeons, knowing of the temple in a general sense, and possibly even an entrance to the underworld. Eventually the orcs stumbled on the Weird Abandoned Temple (area 17A). It was this discovery that convinced a large number of orc slaves to rebel and block off access to the temple, as even the orcs could tell it was something unnatural in the most literal sense of the word, and knew that it would spell their doom if their giant masters were to begin to worship there. Thus, they see themselves as the guardians of the temple, keeping it away from everyone, for their own protection.

By this time, however, the drow had moved on to bigger and more powerful giants as allies, and once it was apparent the hill giants were not true followers of the Elder Elemental God, and with little progress reported in the attempt to excavate our the shrine, the hill

giants lost their prominence in the drow schemes, being kept on more as cannon fodder than anything else. Nosnra realizes and resents this, but maintains the alliance both out of fear of reprisals and because easy loot has still flows into his fat hands. Thus, the orcs cutting off the Temple means nothing to Nosnra, and since the Eilservs have stopped dealing with the hill giants directly, they are unaware of just how close they are to a major discovery that would greatly impact their cult.

## Notes for the Dungeon Master

The lower caverns are far more like the caves in the western third of the Dungeon Level beneath the Steading than they are like the rest of the place. They are for the most part rough natural caves that are typical of underground regions that have been carved by water and seismic activity over the course of millennia. The overhead in the unheated areas varies between 10 feet in passages and 20 feet in the large caves.

The only exceptions are those finished areas that connect with the Weird Abandoned Temple and the Vestry (areas 2 through 8). These well-chiseled areas, which are buttressed every 10 feet and a 17-foot height at the peak of the arch, are obviously of the same older and well-done stonework as the majority of the Dungeon Level.

Access to the Lower Caverns is via the sinkholes in areas 19, 21, and 23 in the Dungeon Level. Each of the sinkholes in those chambers is a hole that opens up into a cave below. The diameter of the holes is as shown on the Dungeon Level map, with a pile of rock and debris beneath, some 10 feet beneath the opening above. The rock pile will be 2-3 feet high at its apex beneath the center of the opening and taper off in a roughly conical shape. If incautious adventurers should simply jump down, this will pose a problem as to how to return to the Dungeon Level, as it is beyond simple jumping or reaching. The irregularly-shaped dotted lines on the Lower Caverns map correspond to the sinkholes on the Dungeon Level map as noted in the text.

The scale of the map is the same as in the original adventure. One square equals ten feet.

## Wandering Monsters:

## Encounter 1 in 8

- 1-3 carrion crawlers from 14. and 15. below
- 1-4 cave crickets (H.P.: 8, 8, 8, 9)
- 1 violet fungus (H.P.: 14)
- 1-3 myconids from #19 (H.P.: 17)

## Rooms and Areas:

1. REBEL ORC UNDERCAVE. The rebel orcs in area #19 of the Dungeon Level use this cave as a dumping ground for trash and prisoners. There is no way back up without assistance, and the orcs above keep a wary eye on the sinkhole, as occasionally some horror from beneath that is able to climb walls, such as a carrion crawler, finds its way here. There is a larger-than-normal pile of debris under the hole, consisting of garbage, refuse, and dung. Hidden in and amongst the refuse is a silver necklace worth 150 g.p. A neo-otyugh dwells here, serving as a rear guard for the orcs in exchange for a steady supply of offal and scraps (HD: 11, H.P.: 55), and also ensures that the discarded debris doesn't grow too tall, which would allow easy access through the sinkhole from below.

The opening in the ceiling leads to the sinkhole in area 19 of the Dungeon Level.

2. TENTACLE CHAMBER. The walls, floor, and ceiling of this room are carved in the form of writhing tentacles. If one looks at them for more than a brief period of time, they seem to move just on the edge's of one's peripheral vision. If anyone stays in this room for more than 2 minutes, they will not be able to shake the feeling that something is moving just out of sight, and will suffer a -2 penalty to all surprise rolls for a week.
3. MOSAIC ROOM. This room is spherical, not merely round. The walls are completely covered in a series of mosaics that spiral and weave across one another, the illustrated narrative passing over and above one another, making the whole very difficult to follow. To make matters worse, the narrative passes right to left, adding to the difficulty. 30 minutes of careful study and a successful INT check (roll INT or lower on 1d20) will reveal one of the following narrative threads in the following order:

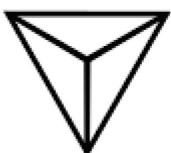
A great purple creature with many tentacles, with similar but smaller creatures as followers, fights with a giant spider, a ram-headed figure, and a dragon.

The smaller tentacled creatures are hunted down by recognizable demons and devils and almost entirely wiped out. A few are seen hiding deep within the earth.

The purple creature with tentacles is imprisoned on a distant star, and the giant spider is seen swallowing the key.

The demonic and infernal figures rampage on earth, slaying and maiming in various horrible ways. The few remaining tentacled creatures watch, almost enviously, from their hiding places.

4. CHAMBER OF THE EYE. Inlaid in copper into the center of the floor is a large symbol some 20' across. It is a triangle split into three by three lines coming in from the points and meeting in the center. The copper is badly tarnished, but the whole radiates magic. Originally this was a teleportation device to another center of the cult, but the destination has long since been obliterated. Anyone crossing one of the lines of the outer triangle will be enveloped in a translucent ray of purplish hue. The ray will last for two rounds; in the first, those within it will feel a slight burning sensation, but nothing harmful. In the next round, anyone remaining in the ray will either take 3d6 points of electrical damage (50% chance) or be teleported to a random spot on the surface 1d4 miles distant (50% chance), as a great puff of smoke emerges from the center point of the symbol.



5. RUBBLE-CHOKED STAIRS. A flight of ridged, step-like stones slants steeply up, and connects to area 18 in the Dungeon Level. It is completely filled with tons of rubble and would take many days to clear.
6. DROW SPY. This chamber is locked from inside, and contains only a pile of rags which is used as a bed. Originally a chamber for one of the priests, it is now occupied by Gleevin Aleval, who infiltrated one of the last embassies of the Eilservs that was sent here, tasked with

finding out the details of their scheme above. He was discovered and fled, eventually reaching these lower caverns and unable to escape. He has been quite forgotten by those above, but has no way of knowing that, and between his paranoia of discovery and the influence of the temple in which he finds himself, he has been driven quite mad by his circumstances and will attack anyone who comes near him. He lives a lonely and dangerous existence, occasionally venturing forth into the caverns for sustenance.

Gleevin Aleval: (5th level fighter/4th level magic-user; H.P.: 24; Strength 9; Intelligence 16; Wisdom 9; Dexterity 16; Constitution 13; Charisma 12; AC 2 = +1 chainmail and +2 dexterity bonus.) His clothes are tattered from his time below, but he still wears a pendant in the shape of a copper staff (the symbol of House Eilservs) that was part of his disguise. He has a +1 shortsword and a +1 dagger, but his spell book was lost when he fled. As such he only has the following spells memorized, for use in a life-and-death emergency:

**First Level: spider climb**

**Second Level: web**

In addition, as can all drow males, he can cast the following spells once per day:

**dancing lights, faerie fire, darkness, detect magic, know alignment, levitate**

7. PRIEST'S CHAMBER. In ancient times, this chamber was used by one of the priests attending the temple. Today it is basically empty, with only a pair of large spiders (H.P.: 6, 6) who come in and out through a split in the wooden door. There is a 50 g.p. gem hidden in the webbing that covers parts of the room.
8. DEAD END CORRIDOR. The eastern 20 feet of this corridor are 20 degrees warmer than the rest of the Lower Caverns. The western 20 feet of this corridor are 20 degrees cooler than the rest of the level. It otherwise has no effect.
9. MUSHROOM CHAMBER. The floor of this cave is covered with large capped mushrooms of various sizes and colors. This is a major source of food for the rebel orcs in the Dungeon Level. Mixed in and amongst the mushrooms are two shriekers (H.P.: 12, 13) and a violet fungus (H.P.: 13). The orcs know they are here and have learned to avoid them.
10. CAVERN MAZE. A green Johnny (H.P.: 23) stalks this small maze of corridors, and will stalk any creature or creatures which enter, picking off any stragglers in a group. It will be alerted if one of the shriekers in area #9 goes off, and will automatically sense prey coming from that cave in such a case. If destroyed, there are 4 gems inside the creature, minimum value 50 g.p., maximum value 1,000 g.p.

11. LARGE FUNGUS CAVERN. This huge chamber is lined with edible fungus on floor and walls, some of which gives off a soft violet glow sufficient to see without aid of torches. Four huge pedipalps (H.P.: 10, 11, 12, 12) and one giant pedipalp (H.P.: 23) quietly munch on the fungus but will gladly supplement their diet with meat if the opportunity affords itself.

In the small cave to the west there is a large spherical puffball mushroom some 8 feet in diameter. This is, in fact,

an ascomoid (H.P.: 35) which will roll out to attack any creature that enters the small cave.

12. STRIPED CAVE. The walls of this cave are embedded with bright green striations in the rock that give it a psychedelic look. It is otherwise unremarkable.

13. GUARDED TREASURE. This sandy-floored cave is empty save for the skeleton of a hill giant which seems to have been carrying a single small iron chest some two feet long and one foot high and wide. The chest is locked, and there is a poison needle trap on the lock which will kill anyone who inadvertently attempts to open the chest. Within are a set of six matched pearls worth 6,000 g.p., a ring of invisibility, and a guardian daemon (H.P.: 44) which will manifest as soon as the chest is opened and assume the form of a barbed devil. It will instantly attack anyone in the vicinity.

14. EGG CHAMBER. After breeding in the CHAMBER OF THE CARRION CRAWLERS (Area #23 on the Dungeon Level), the carrion crawlers return here to deposit their eggs in the corpses of specially-chosen victims. The opening in the ceiling leads to the northernmost sinkhole in area 23 of the Dungeon Level. There are seven such bodies here; two troglodytes with two eggs each, four orcs with one egg each, and a young hill giant with a five eggs, for a total of thirteen eggs. The eggs themselves are sickly white and slightly oblong in shape, embedded into the flesh of the host creature for the young to feast upon as soon as they emerge. The troglodytes and orcs have no treasure, but the hill giant has a silver belt worth 150 g.p. that it was wearing on its wrist.

15. CARRION CRAWLER LAIR. Fully eight of the fearsome creatures will be found here (H.P.: 13, 13, 14, 15, 15, 15, 16, 16). The remains of several orc and troglodyte bodies can be found here, as well as that of a hill giant with an intact bag (roll for contents). The hill giant is also wearing a *necklace of adaptation* on its wrist. The opening in the ceiling leads to the central sinkhole in area 23 of the Dungeon Level.

16. SMALL FUNGUS CAVE. A riotous variety of edible fungi grow here on the walls, floor, and ceiling. Shelf fungus, mushrooms, and many others in a variety of colors can be found. The whole glows with a soft yellow light, allowing vision for those without infravision or ultravision. A dozen cave crickets are here, and will panic and begin jumping at any intrusion (H.P.: 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 9, 10). There is also a 50% chance that 1-3 carrion crawlers from areas 14 and 15 will be in the northern half of the cave, also eating the fungus. They and the crickets will generally not disturb one another, but the crawlers will occasionally pick one off for a snack. There is also a 1 in 6 chance that 1d4 myconids from #19, below, will be here, collecting wild fungus crops to supplement their tilled fields.

The northern opening in the ceiling leads to the southernmost sinkhole in area 23 of the Dungeon Level. The southern opening leads to the sinkhole in area 21 of the Dungeon Level.

17. DAMP CAVE. The walls and ceiling of this cave are very damp, with small rivulets of water flowing down. The water seeps back into the ground before exiting the cave, so there is no real stream to be found. Six cave crickets are here (H.P.: 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 9).

18. MYCONID CROPS. This long chamber is filled with edible fungi of various types arranged in neat rows. Similar types of fungus and mushroom are grouped together, and there are definite signs of organization in how the whole is laid out. There is a 1-in-3 chance that half the myconids from #19 below will be here, tending the crops.

19. MYCONID LAIR. Luminescent shelf-fungus provides light in this cave, which is home to a myconid circle that tends the fungus in #18 above, and occasionally makes forays into some of the other fungus caves to supplement their diet through foraging. A full circle of fungus men dwells here: 1 HD (4) H.P.: 2, 3, 5, 5; 2 HD (4) H.P.: 4, 6, 10, 11, 11; 3 HD (4) H.P.: 7, 12, 13, 13; 4 HD (4) H.P.: 14, 14, 16, 17; 5 HD (3) H.P.: 20, 21, 24; 6 HD (1 – the king) H.P.: 29. They share the same revulsion of all humanoid creatures as the rest of their kind, and will use their spores to drive off any intruders. They largely avoid area #1, as it is frequented by the orcs, but do occasionally venture forth from their own caves to reconnoiter and make sure nothing threatens their peaceful existence. They have fashioned a number of packets of special spores that have the same effect as potions when the grains are inhaled as opposed to ingested; *clairvoyance, diminution, flying, healing, treasure finding, and fungus control* (acts as a *potion of plant control*, but is effective only against fungoid and mushroom-type creatures, not including slimes and jellies).

THIS ENDS THE EXPEDITION TO THE CAVERNS BENEATH THE STEADING

### GREEN JOHNNY

FREQUENCY: Very Rare  
 NO. APPEARING: 1  
 ARMOR CLASS: 5  
 MOVE: 12"  
 HIT DICE: 5  
 % IN LAIR: 0  
 TREASURE TYPE: Q  
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 5  
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-4/1-4/1-4/1-4/1-6  
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: Surprise on 1-3  
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immune to mind-affecting magic  
 MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard  
 INTELLIGENCE: Non-  
 ALIGNMENT: Neutral  
 SIZE: S (4')  
 PSIONIC ABILITY: None

Green Johnnys are a type of carnivorous mobile fungus. They are found in deep underground environments and use their exceptional senses of smell and sensing vibration to hunt prey. They attack with four frond-like branches which are covered in sharp ridges, as well as by biting with a "mouth" ringed with similarly ridged "teeth." They move about on four more fronds which project downward from the central body structure, which is ovoid in shape. They move almost completely silently, and thus can sneak up on prey in the dark. They cannot digest gems, which become secreted within the creature's body as they are ingested.

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Lower Caverns Level

